

GAO

Report to the Subcommittee on  
Personnel, Committee on Armed  
Services, U.S. Senate

January 1998

# MILITARY RECRUITING

## DOD Could Improve Its Recruiter Selection and Incentive Systems



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The Honorable Dirk Kempthorne  
Chairman  
The Honorable Max Cleland  
Ranking Minority Member  
Subcommittee on Personnel  
Committee on Armed Services  
United States Senate

This report responds to the request of the Chairman and the former Ranking Minority Member that we review the recruiter incentive systems that the military services use to optimize the performance of military recruiters and ensure that only fully qualified applicants are enlisted. We reviewed the services' recruiting processes to (1) screen, select, and train recruiters; (2) screen, select, and prepare recruits for basic training; and (3) measure and reward recruiter performance. Specifically, we identified practices in each service that enhance recruiter performance and retention of recruits and could be expanded to other services.

We are sending copies of this report to the Secretaries of Defense, the Army, the Navy, and the Air Force and the Commandant of the Marine Corps. We will also make copies available to others upon request.

Please contact me at (202) 512-5140 if you or your staff have any questions concerning this report. Major contributors to this report are listed in appendix IV.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Mark E. Gebicke".

Mark E. Gebicke  
Director, Military Operations and  
Capabilities Issues

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# Executive Summary

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## Purpose

Through extensive recruiting efforts, the military services send more than 167,000 men and women each year to basic training. However, about one-third of the enlisted personnel recruited since fiscal year 1987 left the military before completing their initial service obligations. In response to concerns of the Chairman and former Ranking Minority Member, Subcommittee on Personnel, Senate Committee on Armed Services, about this attrition and the cost of recruiting and training personnel who do not complete their initial military obligations, GAO reviewed the services' recruiting processes to (1) screen, select, and train recruiters; (2) screen, select, and prepare recruits for basic training; and (3) measure and reward recruiter performance. Specifically, GAO identified practices in each service that enhance recruiter performance and recruit retention and could be expanded to other services.

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## Background

Recruiting and retaining well-qualified military personnel is among the goals included in the Department of Defense's (DOD) strategic plan, as required by the Government Performance and Results Act of 1993.<sup>1</sup> DOD has approximately 12,000 recruiters at 5,500 recruiting stations in the United States and overseas who are responsible for selling potential recruits on the benefits of military service. The Air Force is the only service that has an all-volunteer recruiter force. Each of the services has its own process for selecting, training, and rewarding its recruiters, who are generally assigned monthly goals of people to enlist to help meet their services' annual recruiting missions.

Recruiters prescreen applicants for military service using established criteria. Those applicants who pass this initial screening are sent to 1 of 65 military entrance processing stations located throughout the United States. At these stations, applicants take a battery of tests and receive a medical examination. Applicants who are selected for service sign an enlistment contract and enter the delayed entry program, in an unpaid status, for up to 1 year. Recruits have time while in this program to prepare mentally and physically for basic training. Recruiters are responsible for managing the delayed entry program by providing recruits with information and instruction that will help them to transition from civilian to military life.

Between fiscal years 1987 and 1996, DOD sent approximately 2.2 million recruits to basic training. However, over 700,000 of those recruits failed to

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<sup>1</sup>This act requires all federal agencies to develop strategic plans that define the agency's mission, set goals, and link activities and resources to those goals.

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complete their initial service obligations, with about 200,000 failing to complete even 90 days of service. In addition, recent service data show that between 13 and 21 percent of recruits in the delayed entry program dropped out of the military even before leaving for basic training. Appendix I contains DOD and service information related to the costs of recruiting and training new servicemembers and our analysis of the difficulties associated with estimating the costs of attrition.

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## Results in Brief

DOD could enhance the success of its recruiters if the services strengthened key aspects of their systems for selecting and training recruiters. Only the Air Force requires personnel experienced in recruiting to interview candidates for recruiting positions and uses selection tests to screen interviewees for recruiting duty. While recruiters from each service receive practical training to improve their ability to recruit and enlist personnel, Marine Corps and Navy training also emphasize the importance of retaining recruits once enlisted and require recruiters to focus on retention as well as recruiting.

The services have taken steps to improve their delayed entry programs, such as increasing the amount of contact between recruiters and recruits. Although all the services give recruits in the delayed entry programs access to their physical fitness facilities and encourage the recruits to become or stay physically fit, only the Marine Corps conducts regular physical training for recruits who are waiting to go to basic training. Although recruits who are physically fit are more likely to complete basic training, only the Marine Corps requires all recruits to take a physical fitness test before reporting to basic training.

Achieving monthly goals has been the key measure of recruiter performance. Only the Marine Corps and the Navy consider retention in measuring and rewarding recruiter performance. Specifically, they consider the number of recruits completing basic training when evaluating the success of recruiters. The Army and the Air Force consider primarily the number of recruits enlisted or the number reporting to basic training.

DOD's 1996 survey of service recruiters showed that the number of hours that recruiters work reached its highest point since 1989. Despite this effort, less than one-half of the recruiters achieved their goals in 9 or more months of a 12-month period. The recruiters GAO interviewed were concerned about the difficulties they face in meeting monthly goals and the long hours they must devote to their jobs. Establishing quarterly



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floating goals could ease the burden on recruiters and still provide an incentive to meet recruitment goals.

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## Principal Findings

### Improved Recruiter Selection, Screening, and Training Could Enhance Recruiter Success

The services designate personnel to screen and select recruiters. In general, these personnel follow various processes, including conducting interviews and checking the medical and personnel records of potential recruiters. Factors that may disqualify a person for recruiting duty include average or low performance marks; recent alcohol or drug use; and financial, health, and legal problems. The Air Force has the most extensive screening program, relying heavily on a team of experienced, senior recruiters to interview candidates. In contrast, many Army and Marine recruiting candidates are interviewed by personnel in their current chain of command who may not have recruiting experience. The Navy is beginning to change its recruiter selection procedures to more closely resemble those of the Air Force.

During interviews of prospective candidates for recruiting duty, Air Force recruiters evaluate the potential of candidates to be successful recruiters, including the ability to communicate effectively. In fact, the Air Force recently began using a screening test to assess a candidate's personality. The Army, the Marine Corps, and the Navy tend to focus on a candidate's past performance in non-recruiting positions. However, the Navy is planning to test the use of an instrument that is similar to the Air Force test.

All of the services' recruiter school curriculums emphasize the importance of recruiting well-qualified personnel. However, training for Marine Corps and Navy recruiters also address attrition problems and emphasize the importance of the recruiters' role in retaining recruits after basic training. The Marine Corps also takes advantage of the fact that its recruiter school is colocated with one of its basic training locations. Future recruiters interact with drill instructors and recruits at basic training to gain insight on ways to motivate recruits in the delayed entry program. Navy recruiters have the same interaction but not until after they have been in the recruiting field for a period of time.

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**Increasing Emphasis on Physical Fitness Could Help Reduce Early Attrition**

The delayed entry program provides time for recruits to prepare mentally and physically for basic training. To strengthen the recruits' commitment to serve while in this program, the services have made specific efforts to provide better information, training, and benefits to the recruits. For example, all of the services require recruiters to have regular contact with recruits in the program and give recruits access to their physical fitness centers. The Army also gives its recruits the opportunity to earn points toward future promotions by working on correspondence courses.

Recruits who cannot pass physical fitness tests can be discharged from the services, and service officials acknowledged that poor physical condition among recruits is often a contributing factor in early attrition. Although all of the services encourage recruits in the delayed entry program to maintain or achieve a specific level of physical fitness before leaving for basic training, only the Marine Corps conducts regular physical training and fitness tests. Specifically, Marine recruits usually take a physical fitness test within the first 30 days after entering the program and are required to take the test within 30 days of beginning basic training. A study of almost 14,500 Marines who attended basic training in fiscal year 1994 found that recruits who failed the initial physical fitness test had an attrition rate of 24.1 percent, whereas those who passed had an attrition rate of 13.4 percent.

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**Including Attrition as a Factor in Measuring Recruiter Success Could Increase the Focus on DOD's Retention Goal**

Two of the services include attrition as a factor in measuring and rewarding recruiter performance. Specifically, the Marine Corps ties recruiter success and awards to basic training graduation rates, and the Navy began moving in that direction in fiscal year 1996. However, the Army and the Air Force, which annually bring in almost 55 percent of DOD's recruits, generally reward recruiters based on the number of recruits who are enlisted or who report to basic training rather than the number who graduate and become productive servicemembers. According to DOD's strategic plan, which is required under the Government Performance and Results Act of 1993, one of DOD's goals is not only to recruit well-qualified personnel but also to retain them.

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**Monthly Goals May Restrict Recruiters**

Recruiters in all of the services generally work long hours, take very little leave, and are under almost constant pressure until they achieve their assigned monthly goals. Successful recruiters are often required to make up for recruiters who do not perform well. A 1996 DOD survey indicated that recruiter performance is at an all-time low, even though the number of

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working hours increased to the highest point since 1989. For example, only 42 percent of the services' recruiters met assigned goals for 9 or more months in the previous 12-month period.

The current system of monthly goals requires each recruiter to typically recruit two to three people each month. Recruiters who achieve double their monthly goal are usually assigned the same or higher goals in the next month and are not given credit toward that month's goal. Recruiters who miss their goal in one month are concerned about their performance rating even if they meet or exceed their annual goals. Recruiters GAO interviewed believed that monthly goals were restrictive and that the hours they worked were long. A system of quarterly floating goals could provide recruiters more flexibility in their working hours and leave plans and still provide the checks and incentives needed to encourage productivity.

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## Recommendations

To enhance the performance of recruiters and the retention of recruits, GAO recommends that the Secretary of Defense direct the services to

- use experienced field recruiters to interview in person all potential recruiters and use communication skills as a key recruiter selection criterion;
- develop or procure personality screening tests that can aid in the selection of recruiters;
- emphasize the recruiters' role in reducing attrition in their recruiter training curriculums and provide opportunities for recruiter trainees to gain insight into problems encountered in basic training by having (1) drill instructors meet with students at the recruiter schools and (2) recruiter students meet with separating recruits and those who are being held back due to poor physical conditioning;
- conduct physical fitness tests before recruits report to basic training and encourage the services to incorporate more structured physical fitness training for recruits into their delayed entry programs;
- link recruiter awards more closely to recruits' successful completion of basic training; and
- encourage the use of quarterly floating goals as an alternative to the services current systems of monthly goals.

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## Agency Comments and GAO's Evaluation

In commenting on a draft of GAO's report, DOD concurred with GAO's recommendations to develop or procure personality screening tests to aid in the selection of recruiters, establish better communication between the recruiting force and basic training drill instructors, conduct physical fitness tests on recruits before they report to basic training and encourage the services to incorporate more structured physical fitness training into their delayed entry programs, and link recruiter awards more closely to recruits' successful completion of basic training.

DOD partially concurred with GAO's recommendation to use experienced field recruiters to personally interview all potential recruiters. Although DOD stated that GAO's recommendation is valid, where possible, it also stated that this recommendation is not feasible in the Army due to the large number of men and women who are selected annually for recruiting duty and to the geographic diversity of their assignments. While it may be difficult for the Army to use field recruiters to interview 100 percent of its prospective recruiters, GAO continues to believe that senior, experienced recruiters have a better understanding than operational commanders about what is required in recruiting duty and, therefore, encourages the Army to place a greater emphasis on the use of recruiter selection teams or explore other alternatives that would produce similar results.

DOD also partially concurred with our recommendation to encourage the use of quarterly floating goals as an alternative to the services' current systems of monthly goals. DOD's primary concern with this recommendation is that floating quarterly goals would reduce the services' ability to make corrections to recruiting difficulties before they become unmanageable. However, it should be noted that this proposal is for floating, rather than static, quarterly goals. Floating goals would still provide recruiting commands with the ability to identify recruiting shortfalls in the first month that they occur and control the flow of new recruits into the system on a monthly basis.

DOD's comments appear in their entirety in appendix III and are discussed in chapters 2, 3, and 4.

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**Abbreviations**

DEP	delayed entry program
DOD	Department of Defense
GAO	General Accounting Office
MEPS	military entrance processing station

# Introduction

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To ensure that the Department of Defense (DOD) has an adequate number of military personnel in place to meet U.S. national security objectives, the services continuously conduct recruiting efforts. The four services have nearly 12,000 recruiters at 5,500 recruiting stations throughout the United States and overseas. Each of the services has its own process for selecting, training, and rewarding its recruiters. The Air Force is the only service with a recruiter force comprised entirely of volunteers. Recruiters are generally assigned monthly goals of the number of people to enlist to help meet their services' annual recruiting goals.

Recruiters are responsible for selling the benefits of military service to various audiences, including possible recruits, their parents, and teachers, and then prescreening applicants, according to established criteria, to determine whether the applicants should continue through the enlistment process. Those who pass the prescreening process are sent to 1 of 65 military entrance processing stations (MEPS) located throughout the United States. At a MEPS, applicants take a battery of tests and receive a medical examination to determine their eligibility for military service. Applicants who qualify for service sign their first contract, take their first enlistment oath as members of the Individual Ready Reserve, and enter the delayed entry program (DEP), in an unpaid status, for up to 1 year while awaiting assignment to basic training. While in the DEP, recruits have time to prepare mentally and physically for basic training. Recruiters are responsible for maintaining contact with recruits in the DEP and providing them with information and instruction that will help them successfully move from civilian to military life.

Each service has its own basic training program, and the duration of the four programs ranges from 6 to 12 weeks. Before leaving for basic training, recruits return to the MEPS for final processing. At that time, the recruits undergo another medical examination, sign their second contract, and take their second enlistment oath as active duty servicemembers. After basic training, most recruits attend technical training for a few weeks to more than 1 year before reporting to their first assignment. Most initial enlistments last 4 years, including the time spent in training.

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## Recruiting and Retention Is a Key DOD Goal

The services recruit more than 167,000 men and women each year. Between fiscal years 1987 and 1996, DOD sent almost 2.2 million first-time recruits to basic training, which enabled all four services to meet or exceed their annual recruiting goals during that time. The Army enlisted about 38 percent of these recruits, the Navy 31 percent, the Air Force

16 percent, and the Marine Corps 15 percent. The Marine Corps replaces the greatest portion of its enlisted forces each year—typically close to 20 percent. The Air Force has the smallest yearly personnel changes; new recruits generally constitute less than 10 percent of its total enlisted force. While the number of new enlistees generally declined between 1987 and 1996 due to the drawdown of forces,<sup>1</sup> the percentage of traditional high school diploma graduates remained fairly steady at about 94 percent.

About one-third of the personnel recruited since fiscal year 1987, or more than 700,000 personnel, left military service after reporting to basic training but before completing their initial service obligations. Over this same period, approximately 9 percent, or about 200,000 personnel, left within the first 90 days of service.<sup>2</sup> In addition, recent service data show that between 13 and 21 percent of recruits in the DEP dropped out of the military even before they left for basic training. These high attrition rates mean that recruiters must now enlist two people to fill one service obligation.

Recruiting and retaining well-qualified military personnel is among the goals included in DOD's strategic plan required under the Government Performance and Results Act of 1993 (P.L. 103-62, Aug. 3, 1993). The act was designed to create a new results-oriented federal management and decision-making approach that requires agencies to clearly define their missions, set goals, and link activities and resources to those goals. The act required that federal agencies' strategic plans be developed no later than September 30, 1997, for at least a 5-year period.

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## Objectives, Scope, and Methodology

In response to concerns of the Chairman and former Ranking Minority Member, Subcommittee on Personnel, Senate Committee on Armed Services, about the cost of recruiting and training personnel who do not complete their initial military obligations, we reviewed the services' recruiting efforts to (1) screen, select, and train recruiters; (2) screen, select, and prepare recruits for basic training; and (3) measure and reward recruiter performance. Specifically, we identified practices in each service that enhance recruiter performance and recruit retention and could be expanded to other services. We are also providing DOD and service

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<sup>1</sup>The general downward trend reversed in fiscal year 1996, largely as a result of increased Army accessions.

<sup>2</sup>Our report, *Military Attrition: DOD Could Save Millions by Better Screening Enlisted Personnel* (GAO/NSIAD-97-39, Jan. 6, 1997), addressed attrition occurring within the first 6 months of service. We are currently conducting another assignment that addresses attrition occurring after 6 months but before the end of an enlistment contract.



information related to the costs of recruiting and training new servicemembers and our analysis of the difficulties associated with estimating the costs of attrition (see app. I).

We limited the scope of our review to the role that recruiters might play in reducing attrition. We recognize that many other factors can contribute to attrition, such as medical, security, or other screenings performed by individuals or agencies outside the recruiting commands. However, we did not examine the adequacy of these factors. Also, we did not evaluate the role of basic training policies and personnel in reducing attrition.

To address these objectives, we met with representatives from service recruiting commands, recruiter teams, and service recruiter schools. We also reviewed applicable instructions, regulations, policy statements, and recruiter school curriculums and observed 50 recruiter screening interviews.

In addition, we discussed selection and training procedures with 35 experienced recruiters at various U.S. locations. We also spoke with the recruiters about the role they play in screening applicants for enlistment and preparing them for basic training. Finally, the recruiters provided us with their perspectives of the services' recruiter award and incentive systems. The 35 recruiters did not constitute a representative sample of all recruiters, but they did provide broad perspectives based on more than 280 years of collective recruiting experience in 21 different states. To corroborate their statements, we compared the information they provided us with the results of DOD's 1996 recruiter survey, which was based on a representative sample of recruiters.

We also reviewed past accession and attrition studies done by audit agencies and private firms and collected and analyzed accession and attrition data from each of the services and the Defense Manpower Data Center to determine recruiting and retention trends.

Although we did not extensively test the reliability of the Center's data base, we did check computations of attrition percentages from accession and attrition statistics. We also compared Center data with information in the services' databases. Because personnel numbers can change daily and the service data we used was not compiled on the same day as the Center's data, we did not attempt to match these numbers. However, our data analysis revealed the same trends between service-generated data and Center data, and we did not find any large discrepancies between the

databases. Finally, we discussed our data with recruiting command officials to ensure that no large discrepancies existed.

We performed our work at the following locations:

- Directorate for Accession Policy, Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense, Force Management Policy, Washington, D.C.;
- Army Recruiting Command, Fort Knox, Kentucky;
- Army Recruiting and Retention School, Fort Jackson, South Carolina;
- Air Force Recruiting Service, Randolph Air Force Base, San Antonio, Texas;
- Air Force Technical Training School, Recruiter Training Flight, Lackland Air Force Base, San Antonio, Texas;
- Navy Recruiting Command, Arlington, Virginia;
- Naval Recruiter School, Pensacola, Florida;
- Marine Corps Recruiting Command, Arlington, Virginia; and
- Marine Corps Recruiter School, Marine Corps Recruit Depot, San Diego, California.

We conducted our review between January and December 1997 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards.

# Enhanced Recruiter Selection and Training Could Improve the Recruiting Process

The services use a variety of screening methods, such as reviewing annual performance appraisals and obtaining commanding officer recommendations, to ensure that personnel who are assigned to recruiting duty are chosen from among the best noncommissioned officers in their respective career fields. However, not all of these screening methods ensure that personnel selected for recruiting duty possess the communication and interpersonal skills necessary to be successful recruiters. The Air Force is the only service that critically evaluates communication skills as part of the recruiter screening process. It is also the only service that uses a personality assessment test during its recruiter screening.

Personnel selected for recruiting duty in all of the services receive practical training in communication skills, sales techniques, and enlistment and paperwork requirements. This training supports a direct link between recruiter daily performance and DOD's strategic goal of recruiting well-qualified military personnel. However, only the Marine Corps and the Navy recruiter schools have curriculums that are directly linked with DOD's goal of retaining these personnel.

## Services' Recruiter Selection Standards Do Not Necessarily Identify the People Most Likely to Succeed

Because recruiters represent the military services in civilian communities, they must meet high selection standards. These standards ensure that recruiters are selected from among the best noncommissioned officers in the military, but they do not necessarily identify those who possess or can develop the communication and interpersonal skills needed to become successful recruiters. Only the Air Force's screening process critically evaluates servicemembers' communication skills and uses assessment tests to predict the likelihood of their success as recruiters.

## Communication Skills Are Not Emphasized in the Screening Processes of All Services

Although actual screening standards vary by service, the recruiting commands generally use interviews and medical and personnel records to screen and select personnel for recruiting duty. The services generally draw their recruiters from noncommissioned officers in paygrades E-5 through E-7. During the screening process, the services use different but measurable criteria to evaluate a prospective recruiter's education, health, moral character, emotional and financial stability, personal appearance, and job performance. Failure to meet any of these standards can disqualify a person from recruiting duty. The services also have minimum and maximum pay grade and time-in-service requirements, and those selected for recruiting duty are generally required to reenlist if they do not have at

least 3 years remaining on their current enlistment. Finally, personnel with performance marks below a certain level are not eligible for recruiting duty. For example, Navy regulations disqualify any servicemember who has received an overall evaluation below 3.8 or individual marks below 3.6 (on a 4.0 rating scale) during the previous 3 years.

Successful recruiters must be able to effectively communicate with a variety of people in the civilian community and convince them of the benefits of military service. These people include not only potential recruits but also parents, teachers, guidance counselors, coaches, school administrators, and others who may influence potential recruits. However, we found that only the Air Force's screening process has measurable criteria to evaluate the communication and interpersonal skills of prospective recruiters. It is important to measure these skills because noncommissioned officers can excel in many military job specialties without possessing the ability to effectively interact with the general civilian population.

The Air Force is the only service to require that recruiting command officials interview all prospective recruiters. Most Air Force interviews (about 70 percent) are conducted by a team of experienced recruiters who travel to U.S. and overseas bases. The team makes general presentations about recruiting duty and then conducts interviews with individuals who are interested in becoming recruiters. According to a team member, interviews generally last between 30 and 45 minutes, and spouses are required to be present. A prospective recruiter's ability to communicate with the team is a key factor in determining whether the person will be selected. Prospective recruiters who lack communications skills can be rejected even if they meet all the pay grade, time-in-service, legal, financial, appearance, and performance requirements. The remaining interviews (30 percent) are for personnel who were not available or interested in recruiting at the time of the recruiter team's visit. These candidates are interviewed by a high-level recruiting command official in their geographic area.

The Marine Corps also has a recruiter screening team that travels to bases to present an overview of recruiting duty and interview people who have volunteered for recruiting duty or have been identified by the recruiting command as possible recruiters. However, a prospective recruiter's ability to communicate with the screening team is not critically evaluated during these screening interviews, which typically last 5 to 10 minutes. Spouses are encouraged, but not required, to attend the interviews. Most Marines

recruiters are screened by the team, but those who are unable to attend an interview with the screening team can be selected for recruiting duty based on a check of their records and an interview with their commanding officer. Marines who are selected for recruiting duty undergo a second, more in-depth screening interview when they arrive at the Marine Corps recruiter school in San Diego.

The Army's recruiter team interviews a much smaller percentage of the soldiers who have volunteered or are identified as prospective recruiters than the Air Force and the Marine Corps recruiter selection teams. Prospective Army recruiters can be interviewed by high-level officials within their chain of command who may, but most likely do not, have recruiting experience. These officials use a general checklist in deciding whether to recommend a person for recruiting duty. The checklist has measurable criteria for some items. For example, prospective recruiters must be a sergeant, a staff sergeant, or a sergeant first class and must have between 4 and 14 years time in service. They must also be high school graduates or have 1 year of college and a high school equivalency degree, and they cannot have been convicted of a crime by a civilian court or military court-martial. However, the checklist does not have any measurable standards regarding the prospective recruiters' communication or interpersonal skills.

Volunteers and other prospective Navy recruiters are interviewed by their commanding officers to determine whether they meet established standards. The commanding officers do not evaluate the prospective recruiters' ability to communicate effectively in determining whether to endorse a person for recruiting duty. Navy officials told us that they think recruiting command personnel are in a better position to evaluate a person's chances of being a successful recruiter. Therefore, the Navy is beginning to change its recruiter selection procedures to more closely resemble those of the Air Force. These officials said that the Navy hopes to have a traveling recruiter selection team in place in the near future. In its response to a draft of this report, DOD stated that the Navy has, in fact, assembled a recruiting team consisting of four career recruiters who will be augmented by field recruiters.

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## Air Force Uses a Personality Test to Screen Prospective Recruiters

In 1996, noting the results of studies of private salespeople,<sup>1</sup> the Air Force began investigating the possibility of using a personality assessment test in screening potential recruiters. After administering a commercially developed biographical screening test to 1,171 recruiters, the Air Force found that recruiters with certain traits were much more likely to succeed than recruiters who lacked those traits. These traits, in order of importance, were assertiveness, empathy, self-regard (awareness of strengths and weaknesses), problem-solving ability, happiness and optimism, interpersonal relations, emotional self-awareness (ability to recognize one's feelings), and reality testing (ability to distinguish between what you see and what is). The study also found that high performers worked the least number of hours and reported higher marital satisfaction and that neither the recruiter's geographic region nor zone was a factor in predicting recruiter success. In August 1997, the Air Force purchased the 133-question biographical screening test for less than the cost of putting one recruiter in the field. In November 1997, the Air Force's recruiter screening team began administering this test to prospective recruiters.

All of the services use the armed services vocational aptitude battery of tests to measure servicemembers' aptitude for initial job placement, yet none of the services uses this battery of tests to evaluate a person's aptitude for recruiting. In its response to a draft of this report, DOD stated that the Navy is planning to test the use of an instrument that is similar to the Air Force test.

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## Recruiter Screening Continues During the Training Process

Personnel selected for recruiting duty report to training sites where their suitability for recruiting duty continues to be evaluated. To become fully qualified, all recruiters undergo formal classroom training that lasts between 5 and 7 weeks and on-the-job training that can last up to 1 year. The Air Force and the Marine Corps are not only more selective than the other two services in the recruiters they send to school but also in the recruiters they allow to graduate from school. The Air Force recruiter school has an attrition rate of 17 percent, despite having all volunteer recruiters who have passed the most detailed pretraining screening process of the four services. Attrition rates at the Marine Corps recruiter school typically run between 14 and 16 percent. The Navy recruiter school has an attrition rate of approximately 6 percent, and the Army recruiter school attrition rate was under 5 percent during fiscal year 1997.

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<sup>1</sup>Personality tests allow private firms to predict an applicant's potential to succeed before investing resources in hiring and training the individual. Although there are significant differences between military recruiters and civilian salespeople, both professions require people with excellent communication skills who are capable of effectively interacting with the general public.

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## Air Force Recruiters Have the Highest Success Rates

Air Force recruiters are more than twice as productive as recruiters from the other services. On average, each Air Force recruiter sends at least 32 recruits to basic training each year, whereas recruiters for the other services send between 12 and 16 recruits to basic training annually. Officials from all the services acknowledged that part of this difference is due to the fact that the Air Force is "the service of choice," receiving the most walk-in applicants and having the lowest turnover rate of the services. However, the Commanding General of the Air Force Recruiting Service attributes a large part of this success to the Air Force's intensive recruiter screening process. Also, Air Force recruiters are the most successful in terms of meeting their assigned goals. Despite having the highest individual recruiting goals, DOD's 1996 recruiter survey showed that 62 percent of Air Force recruiters reported making their assigned monthly goals 9 or more times during the previous year, compared with a DOD average of 42 percent.

Lower turnover rates may also contribute to the success rate of Air Force recruiters. Air Force recruiters typically serve 4-year tours, whereas recruiters in the other services normally serve 3-year tours. Various studies have found that recruiter productivity increases after an initial learning period in the field, suggesting that the positive effects of experience can be realized as early as the 4-month point or as late as the 2-year point. Regardless of the length of the learning curve, the Air Force achieves some efficiency from the increased experience and lower turnover rates of its recruiters.

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## Most Recruiter Training Does Not Emphasize Communication With Basic Training Personnel

The services' recruiter schools support a direct link between recruiter daily performance and DOD's strategic goal to recruit well-qualified military personnel. The curriculums consist of instruction, practical exercises, and examinations in communication and sales techniques as well as enlistment and paperwork requirements. However, only the Marine Corps recruiter school spends a significant amount of time teaching recruiters about preventing attrition, thus supporting DOD's strategic goal to retain well-qualified personnel.

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## Marine Corps Emphasizes Communication and Leadership as Ways to Reduce Attrition

The Marine Corps recruiter school, located at the Marine Corps Recruit Depot in San Diego, supports DOD's strategic retention goal by teaching recruiters that they have an important role in reducing attrition that occurs before the end of the first enlistment contract. Communication and leadership are viewed as the keys to reducing attrition. The curriculum



devotes more than a full week, out of 7, to these issues: 2-1/2 days to communication and basic training issues and 3-1/2 days to leadership training. Students at recruiter training discuss attrition issues with basic training drill instructors, recruits who are separating from basic training, and recruits who are being held back in basic training because they cannot meet the physical fitness requirements. Marine Corps officials believe this interaction with drill instructors helps to open the lines of communication between drill instructors and recruiters after the recruiters graduate. The interaction with recruits helps the recruiters to realize that they not only need to recruit people but that they also need to prepare them for basic training and maintain contact with them while they are at basic training.

A large portion of the Marine Corps school's leadership training focuses on the effect that DEP leadership can have on reducing attrition. One lesson begins with a classroom demonstration in which all of the students are initially standing. Then, about 19 percent of the students are told to sit down to represent DEP discharges. Next, another 12 percent are instructed to sit down to represent basic training attrition. Finally, another 25 percent of the class is told to sit down to represent the rest of the first-term attrition. This lesson vividly illustrates to the students that less than one of every two recruits actually completes the first full term of obligated service. Afterward, the instructor explains that recruiters have to make up every one of the discharges and emphasizes the four goals of the Marine Corps' national DEP: to reduce DEP attrition, reduce basic training attrition, positively impact other first-term attrition, and deliver better motivated Marines to the Fleet Marine Force. Marine Corps recruiters are taught that they must sell their enlistees on the features and benefits of DEP,<sup>2</sup> just as they sold them initially on the Marine Corps.

All Marine Corps recruiters are required to write to their recruits and the recruits' families while the recruits are in basic training. One Marine Corps recruiter told us that he was required to send three letters to each recruit in basic training and that none of the letters was allowed to be a form letter. According to Marine Corps recruiters, drill instructors often call recruiters to warn them if one of their recruits is having trouble at basic training. To prevent attrition, the recruiters can then talk to their recruits on the telephone and remind them of the reasons that they joined the Marine Corps. The recruiters said basic training attrition would probably be much higher if they were not given early warnings of trouble and allowed to resell their recruits on the benefits of serving in the Marine

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<sup>2</sup>Recruits who participate in DEP activities are better prepared for basic training, as evidenced by their lower attrition rates. In addition, recruits can get to know other recruits in the DEP, and can even be promoted if they supply qualified referrals who enlist in the Marine Corps.



Corps. According to a Marine Corps document, the percentage of recruit training graduates is indicative of the efforts that have taken place from contract to accession. It demonstrates quality prospecting and screening, sound sales practices, and an effective DEP.

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### Other Service Curriculums Do Not Include Interactions With Drill Instructors and Recruits

Although the Army's recruiter school is located at Fort Jackson, South Carolina, which is also the site of one of its basic training programs, the curriculum does not include any interaction between future recruiters and recruits or drill instructors at basic training. Likewise, the Air Force's recruiter school is colocated with its basic training squadrons at Lackland Air Force Base in San Antonio, Texas. However, the curriculum does not include discussions between the students and drill instructors or new recruits, except during a 1-hour tour of the basic training facilities. Students at the Navy's recruiter school do not have any interaction with drill instructors or recruits because the recruiter school is located in Florida and the basic training site is in Illinois. However, the Navy recently began a 4-day refresher training course for its recruiters who have been in the field between 12 and 18 months. The refresher course is held at the basic training site in Illinois, and recruiters spend about one-half of their time observing and interacting with recruits and their families, drill instructors, and other training command personnel at basic training and graduation events. After all current recruiters have attended this training, the Navy plans to send new recruiters to the training after they have been in the field about 6 to 8 months.

The Army, the Navy, and the Air Force do not have separate leadership modules in their recruiter school curriculums. Although they all include instruction in DEP management as part of their recruiter curriculums, this training is less extensive than the Marine Corps' leadership training, lasting only 3 to 9 hours. In addition, these services do not emphasize the relationship between effective DEP management and DOD's strategic retention goal.

Army, Navy, and Air Force recruiters we spoke with said that drill instructors hardly ever call them to give an early warning that a recruit is having difficulties at basic training. The recruiters said they usually learn that a recruit is having problems only through the recruit's family or when they see the recruit back in town after dropping out of basic training. In addition, some Air Force recruiters told us that they were prohibited from writing letters to recruits in basic training due to concerns that some recruits would receive more mail from their recruiters than others.

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## Conclusions

By carefully selecting recruiters based on a demonstrated aptitude for recruiting, as well as excellent performance in another military specialty, the services should be able to increase the effectiveness of their recruiters. In addition, by training these recruiters to lead and motivate recruits in the DEP and requiring the recruiters to keep in touch with their recruits at basic training, the services could help to increase retention and the efficiency of their recruiting commands.

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## Recommendations

For the services to meet DOD's strategic goal of recruiting and retaining well-qualified military personnel, optimize recruiting command efficiency by identifying personnel who are likely to succeed as recruiters, and increase recruits' chances of graduating from basic training, we recommend that the Secretary of Defense instruct the services to

- use experienced field recruiters to personally interview all prospective recruiters and evaluate their potential to effectively communicate with applicants, parents, teachers, and others in the civilian community;
- jointly explore the feasibility of developing or procuring assessment tests that can aid in the selection of recruiters; and
- instruct officials at the service recruiting schools to emphasize the retention portion of DOD's long-term strategic goal by having drill instructors meet with students at the schools and having the recruiters in training meet with separating recruits and those being held back due to poor physical conditioning. These practices could establish an ongoing dialogue between recruiters and drill instructors and enhance understanding of problems that lead to early attrition.

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## Agency Comments and Our Evaluation

DOD partially concurred with our recommendation to use experienced field recruiters to interview all prospective recruiters. In its response, DOD agreed that the selection and training of the recruiter force is of vital importance and that our recommendation to use experienced recruiters to personally interview prospective recruiters is valid, where possible. However, DOD also stated that this recommendation is not economically feasible in the Army due to the large number of men and women who are selected annually for recruiting duty and to the geographic diversity of their assignments. While it may be difficult for the Army to use field recruiters to interview 100 percent of its prospective recruiters, we continue to believe that senior, experienced recruiters have a better understanding than operational commanders about what is required in recruiting duty. Therefore, we encourage the Army to place a greater

emphasis on the use of recruiter selection teams or explore other alternatives that would produce similar results. In the case of the Marine Corps, DOD did not present any reasons to suggest that this service could not implement this recommendation. Instead, DOD referred to the additional screening that the Marine Corps conducts at its recruiter school and the Marine Corps' belief that it does not place any recruiters on the street who are not properly screened. We discussed this additional screening and cited the relatively high attrition rate that this school experiences. However, we also presented some limitations in the Marine Corps' current screening process and believe, therefore, that this service would also benefit from this recommendation. As previously stated in this report and in DOD's comments, the Air Force already relies on recruiters, and the Navy is changing its recruiter selection procedures to more closely resemble those of the Air Force.

DOD concurred with our recommendation to jointly explore the feasibility of developing or procuring assessment tests that can aid in the selection of recruiters. In its response, DOD said that the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Force Management Policy will work with the services to evaluate various assessment tests.

DOD also concurred with our recommendation to establish better communication between the recruiting force and basic training drill instructors, adding that this recommendation is sound and viable. In its response, DOD stated that the Army is reviewing the recruiter school curriculum and will establish a linkage between the recruiter school and the recruiter liaison at the basic training site at Fort Jackson and that the Air Force has incorporated an in-depth tour of basic training into its recruiting school's curriculum. DOD also cited the Navy's refresher training for new recruiters, where recruiters have the opportunity to meet and interview recruits during the last week of basic training.

# Additional Physical Fitness Preparation Can Enhance Recruit Retention

Recruiters use standard criteria in screening applicants for military service, but physical fitness is not among the criteria. Thus, the services have no assurance that recruits will be able to pass their physical fitness tests in basic training. To help prepare recruits for basic training and reduce early attrition, the services are now encouraging recruits to maintain or improve their physical fitness while in the DEP. However, only the Marines Corps conducts regular physical fitness training for its recruits in the DEP and requires them to take a physical fitness test before reporting to basic training. The Marine Corps has found that attrition is lower among those who pass this test.

## Recruiters Consider Standard Criteria in Screening Recruits

Recruiters are only one part of the enlistment process. They play an important role in the process by applying criteria established by Congress, DOD, and the individual services during initial screening interviews to identify applicants who are preliminarily qualified for enlistment. However, physical fitness is not among the criteria. Also, recruits may request a waiver if they do not meet one or more of the established criteria.

## Recruiters Play an Important Role in the Enlistment Process

Service personnel in several different organizations play a role in screening and selecting candidates for military service. The accuracy and thoroughness of the recruiter in screening for established criteria during the initial interview are critical to the efficiency of the entire recruit selection process. Failure to screen for all of the established criteria can allow unqualified candidates to continue needlessly through the selection process, wasting time and money on applicants who will likely be disqualified during further enlistment processing at a MEPS or discharged from service.

The head of one service's recruiting command told us that recruiters should be selective in their initial screenings and that it is appropriate for them to use their judgment in addition to the established criteria. However, most recruiters we spoke with said that they do not screen out individuals who meet the established screening criteria. The recruiters also explained that they generally did not want to pass judgment on an applicant's suitability for service because some prior assessments had proven to be wrong. In addition, the recruiters were concerned that they could receive congressional inquiries if individuals who met the eligibility criteria were not selected for service.

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## Standard Criteria Do Not Include Physical Fitness

Congress and DOD have set minimum standards for two of the primary screening criteria—possession of a high school diploma and score on the Armed Forces Qualification Test. DOD guidelines state that a minimum of 90 percent of recruits who have not previously served in the military need high school diplomas. The guidelines also state that at least 60 percent of first-time recruits need to score in the top three of six mental categories on the qualification test. Further, Congress has prohibited the selection of recruits from the bottom test category and limited the number of recruits who can score in the next lowest category.

DOD and service enlistment standards establish additional criteria that potential recruits must meet. These criteria, which can vary by service, include age, citizenship, weight, number of dependents, health, prior drug or alcohol abuse, and law violations. Potential recruits also receive a medical examination to determine a certain level of wellness. However, actual physical fitness is not included as a criterion, even though service officials acknowledge that poor physical conditioning among recruits is often a contributing factor in early attrition. As a result, the services spend thousands of dollars training recruits without any assurance that they will be capable of passing their physical fitness tests. Recruits who cannot pass service physical fitness tests face discharge.

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## Some Enlistment Criteria May Be Waived

Most of the applicants who are enlisted meet all of the services' enlistment criteria. However, those applicants who do not meet one or more of these criteria can continue to pursue entrance into the military by requesting a waiver for each criterion not met. Recruiters are not required to encourage unqualified prospects to apply for a waiver. Nevertheless, when applicants wish to pursue a waiver, recruiters do not have the authority to disapprove this request and must forward the waiver through their chains of command.

Generally, the farther an applicant is from meeting an established standard, the higher the waiver approval authority. For example, an Army applicant convicted of driving under the influence could apply for a waiver from a recruiting battalion commander. However, a waiver request for two incidents of driving under the influence would need to be considered by the Commanding General of the Army Recruiting Command. The burden is on applicants to prove to the waiver authorities that they have overcome any disqualifying condition.

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## Improved DEP Participation Can Enhance Recruit Retention Levels

To enhance recruit retention levels, the services are improving their DEPs. The services now encourage recruits to maintain or improve their physical fitness level so that they will be able to meet the initial physical conditioning requirements of basic training. However, only the Marine Corps conducts regular physical fitness training for its recruits and requires them to take a physical fitness test while in the DEP. The Marine Corps reports that attrition is lower among recruits who passed the test.

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## DEPs Are Being Improved

One of the purposes of the DEP is to obtain a recruit's commitment to serve. The services have recently attempted to strengthen the commitment of recruits in the DEP by providing them with better information, training, and benefits. The services believe that individuals with a strong commitment to serve are less likely to drop out of the DEP or leave military service before the end of their first enlistment period.

The Navy and the Marine Corps recognize the positive effect the DEP can have on retention rates and have established a minimum and optimum time, respectively, that their recruits should spend in the DEP. Overall DOD attrition statistics for fiscal years 1987 through 1994 showed that recruits who spent at least 3 months in the DEP had lower attrition rates than those who spent less time. This correlation was much stronger for the Marine Corps and the Navy than it was for the Army and the Air Force.

DEP programs vary by service, but all require their recruiters and recruits to be in regular contact with each other. Army, Navy, and Air Force recruiters are responsible for contacting their recruits on a regular basis. The Marine Corps, on the other hand, tries to instill responsibility in its recruits by requiring them to contact their recruiters each week.

Participation in DEP activities is voluntary, but all of the services strongly encourage recruits to attend monthly DEP meetings to help them prepare for basic training. Some services also give recruits basic training material to study before basic training begins. In addition, Army recruits have the opportunity to earn points toward future promotions by working on correspondence courses while in the DEP.

All of the services are also encouraging recruits to maintain or improve their level of physical fitness while in the DEP. For example, recruits now have access to their service's physical fitness centers. However, only the Marine Corps conducts regular physical training for DEP members and requires all recruits to take a physical fitness test before leaving for basic

training. Other services only require recruits in a few selected career fields to take physical fitness tests before basic training. Army and Air Force officials have expressed concerns about service liability for injuries that recruits could sustain during DEP physical training. The Navy addressed this concern by giving recruits access to medical facilities if they suffer DEP-related injuries. Marine Corps officials said that there have been minor injuries during DEP physical training but that none of these injuries have resulted in a serious claim against the government.

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### Marine Corps Holds DEP Recruits to Higher Standards

The Marine Corps generally holds its DEP recruits to higher standards than the other services. These recruits are told that they must earn their way to basic training by preparing mentally, psychologically, and physically. The Commander of the Marine Corps Recruiting Command stated that failure to participate in DEP training programs is evidence of a lack of desire and motivation to become a Marine and could result in discharge.

The Marine Corps implemented changes to its DEP in May 1994, and physical training is a key component of this program. Recruiters are encouraged to give recruits an initial physical fitness test within their first 30 days in the DEP, but a test must be given within 30 days of the date that the recruit is to leave for basic training. Recruiters also encourage recruits to exceed the test's minimum requirement before leaving for basic training.

According to the Commander of the Marine Corps Recruiting Command, recruits who cannot accomplish the minimum standard in the physical fitness test experience significantly higher attrition rates and are much more at risk of injury than those who can pass the test.<sup>1</sup> Marine Corps attrition statistics also show a strong correlation between performance on the test and attrition rates. A study of almost 14,500 male Marines who attended basic training in fiscal year 1994 found that recruits who failed the initial physical fitness test had an attrition rate of 24.1 percent, whereas those who passed had an attrition rate of 13.4 percent. In addition, attrition rates were only about 11 percent for recruits who far exceeded the minimum test requirements by doing 10 or more pull-ups or running a 1-1/2 miles in less than 12 minutes.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Minimum passing requirements for males are 2 pull-ups, 35 sit-ups in under 2 minutes, and a 1-1/2-mile run in 13 minutes and 30 seconds or less.

<sup>2</sup>There was no statistically significant difference in attrition rates for those who did 35 to 39 sit-ups and those recruits who did 50 or more sit-ups.



Statistics also show that recent Marine Corps efforts to reduce attrition, including the changes to its DEP in May 1994, are working. Twelve-month attrition rates across DOD rose from 15 percent in fiscal year 1990 to 19 percent in fiscal year 1995. However, while Army, Navy, and Air Force attrition rates were increasing by 4 to 6 percent over this time period, Marine Corps attrition rates declined by 4 percent.

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## Conclusions

Recruiters have many tools at their disposal to help them screen candidates for military service. However, while education requirements provide some assurance that recruits will be capable of learning the academic material that will help them become productive servicemembers, and physical examinations provide some assurance that recruits have a minimum level of wellness, the absence of physical fitness screening requirements prevents the services from having any assurance that their recruits will be able to pass their physical fitness tests. Since all servicemembers are required to pass physical fitness tests, the services may be investing thousands of dollars training an individual who will eventually face discharge.

The Army, the Navy, and the Air Force may be able to improve their attrition rates by running stronger DEP programs. The Marine Corps emphasizes physical fitness training in its DEP program and administers a physical fitness test to its recruits at least 30 days before they report to basic training. Recent statistics show a strong correlation between performance on this test and attrition rates. Recruits who attained higher scores on the test experienced lower attrition rates than those who either attained lower scores or failed the test. Although it may be more difficult for recruiters with large geographic areas to conduct regular physical training with members of their DEP, most recruiters should not have this problem. However, even recruiters with large areas should be able to follow the Marine Corps' practice of giving all recruits a physical fitness test before basic training.

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## Recommendations

To maintain recruit quality and increase a recruit's chances of graduating from basic training, we recommend that the Secretary of Defense instruct the Army, the Navy, and the Air Force to implement the Marine Corps' practice of administering a physical fitness test to recruits before they report to basic training. In addition, we recommend that the Secretary encourage the services to incorporate more structured physical fitness training into their DEP program.



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## Agency Comments and Our Evaluation

In commenting on a draft of this report, DOD concurred with our recommendation regarding administering a physical fitness test to recruits before they report to basic training and encouraging the services to incorporate more structured physical fitness training into their DEP programs (see app. III). DOD stated that, in an attempt to reduce basic training attrition, the Army, the Navy, and the Air Force are now taking steps similar to the Marine Corps to better prepare recruits in the DEP for the physical rigors of basic training. Furthermore, DOD stated that the Office of the Secretary of Defense for Force Management Policy will investigate the legal status of DEP members and the limits of their medical entitlements while they are in the DEP.

# Some Service Performance Measures Ignore Attrition, and Monthly Goals May Restrict Recruiters

All of the services reward recruiter success. However, many existing awards and incentives are based on output measures that do not reflect DOD's long-term retention goal to retain quality personnel. Only the Marine Corps and the Navy use basic training graduation rates as criteria in evaluating recruiters for awards, thus linking DOD's strategic goals to their recruiters' daily operations.

According to DOD recruiter satisfaction surveys, recruiter job performance has been declining since 1991, and is the lowest it has been since recruiter surveys were first administered in 1989. In 1996, 58 percent of the services' recruiters said they had missed their monthly goals 3 or more times during the previous 12 months. Recruiters also said that they are under constant pressure to make their assigned goals and that their working hours are increasing.

DOD's 1996 recruiter survey showed that 54 percent of recruiters were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with recruiting, compared with 47 percent in DOD's 1994 survey and 35 percent in the 1991 survey. The results of DOD's recruiter surveys and our interviews with experienced recruiters show that current award and incentive systems have not effectively dealt with recruiters' two biggest concerns—their monthly goals and working hours.

## Some Award Systems Are Not Tied to the Right Performance Measures

Incentive and award systems based on recruit graduation rates from basic training would provide the services with a required link between DOD's long-term strategic goals to recruit and retain well-qualified military personnel and daily recruiter operations. However, only the Marine Corps and the Navy use recruits' basic training graduation rates as key criteria when evaluating recruiters for awards. The Army and the Air Force measure recruiter performance primarily by the number of recruits who enlist or the number who report to basic training rather than the number who graduate and become productive servicemembers.

Award and incentive systems have differed significantly by service and within services over time, but they are usually based on point systems that take into account the quality of recruits enlisted, the positions the recruits fill, and the recruiter's success in making his or her goal.<sup>1</sup> At various times, the services have used individual, team, and combination awards, and they have based these awards on both absolute and relative performance. Despite numerous studies on recruiter award and incentive systems, all of

<sup>1</sup>The Marine Corps does not have a point system and counts all recruits the same for competition purposes.

the services have been unable to settle on an optimal system. Also, the services have, at times, altered their recruiter incentive systems in opposite directions: as one service moved from individual to team awards, another de-emphasized team awards and moved toward greater reliance on individual awards. Current recruiter awards vary from badges and plaques to meritorious promotions.

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**Recruit Attrition Is a Key**  
**Criterion for Marine Corps**  
**Recruiter Awards**

The Marine Corps is the only service that has consistently used attrition data as an important criterion in determining awards for its top performers. For example, the Commandant of the Marine Corps gives out two top achievement awards annually, one for the top recruiter and one for the top noncommissioned officer in charge of a recruiting substation. The recruiters nominated for these awards must meet numerical and quality accession goals and have DEP attrition rates below 20 percent and basic training attrition rates below 13 percent. Between 1993 and 1996, Marine Corps basic training attrition remained relatively stable between 12.7 and 13.5 percent. Therefore, recruiters nominated for the Commandant's awards had to ensure that their recruits' basic training attrition rates were at or below average attrition rates. Marine Corps recruiting awards presented at lower levels also take attrition rates into account.

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**Navy Uses a Point System**  
**to Reward Recruiters for**  
**Recruit Success**

The Navy has numerous awards for its top recruiters and recruiting stations but, unlike the Marine Corps, bases these awards on a competitive point system. Since fiscal year 1996, this point system has undergone several changes that were designed to give greater weight to recruits who completed part or all of basic training.

The Navy awards recruiters points when one of their recruits enlists at a MEPS. The number of points awarded is based on Navy needs and can vary throughout the year. Recruits with high school diplomas and good enlistment test scores who enlist into difficult fields, such as nuclear power, generally earn recruiters high point levels. Conversely, recruits without diplomas or with low test scores usually yield recruiters fewer points. Recruiters can also earn points when their recruits help the Navy to meet its racial, ethnic, or gender goals. In fiscal year 1998, Navy recruiters will be awarded an additional set of points, worth four times the original point value, when a recruit leaves for basic training, thus giving recruiters a strong incentive to monitor and mentor their recruits in the DEP. When recruits graduate from basic training, the Navy will award their

recruiters with additional points worth 5 times the recruit's original point value, for a total of 10 times the original point value. The additional points give recruiters a strong incentive to ensure that recruits are motivated and prepared to succeed at basic training. To be competitive, a recruiter who can sell applicants on enlisting but cannot motivate them to go to basic training would have to enlist 10 applicants just to keep pace with the recruiter who enlists and motivates 1 recruit who graduates from basic training.

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**Army and Air Force  
Recruiter Awards Are Not  
Based on Recruit  
Retention**

Army and Air Force awards are generally based on the number and quality of initial contracts and accessions in relation to assigned recruiting goals. These services do not reward recruiters based on the number of recruits who graduate and go on to become productive soldiers or airmen. The Army and the Air Force, which bring in almost 55 percent of DOD's new recruits, see clear lines of separation between the recruiting and training processes, and believe it is inappropriate to hold recruiters accountable for recruits who fail to complete basic training.

Although the Army and the Air Force do not use basic training graduation rates as key criteria when selecting award recipients, they can exclude recruiters from awards if their attrition statistics are extremely high. For example, Air Force senior and master recruiter badges are earned primarily on the basis of production, but recruiters are not eligible for the badges if the basic training attrition rate for their recruits is above 15 percent. Between fiscal year 1993 and 1996, overall Air Force basic training attrition rates varied between 8.7 and 11.1 percent. Therefore, a recruiter's basic training attrition rate had to be 35 to 72 percent above the Air Force average before he or she was prevented from earning a senior or master recruiter badge.

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**Recruiters Have to Make  
Up for Early Attrition**

In effect, all of the services hold their recruiters indirectly accountable for early attrition through higher goals, even if their awards systems do not reflect this. The number of recruits that is needed in a given year is determined based on projected end strengths, historical loss rates, and the mix of contract lengths for current servicemembers. In setting goals for their recruiters, the services recognize two different types of attrition. The first is DEP attrition, which occurs between the time an applicant first signs an enlistment contract at a MEPS and the date the recruit leaves for basic training. The second is active duty attrition, which occurs any time after a servicemember reports to basic training.

Recruits in the DEP are allowed to quit for any reason. Enlistment contracts are simply canceled for those who quit, with no permanent adverse effect on the recruits. However, with the exception of the Navy,<sup>2</sup> recruiters are held individually responsible for DEP attrition, and their current month's goal is raised each time one of their recruits drops out of the DEP.

Recruiters are not held individually responsible for active duty attrition. However, the services use active duty attrition rates, which have remained fairly steady at about one-third of accessions, to compute annual goals for the service recruiting commands. Application of this attrition rate causes recruiting command goals to be much higher than they would be if attrition did not exist or was much lower.

Since recruiting command headquarters personnel do not actually recruit, increased recruiting goals are passed down through the chain of command and eventually result in increased goals for individual recruiters in the field. Therefore, although some services claim that recruiters cannot affect attrition and should not be held accountable for it, all of the services are, in fact, currently holding their recruiters accountable for attrition.

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## Most Recruiters Are Not Meeting Monthly Goals

Recruiter performance is primarily measured against and driven by monthly contracting and accession goals. Additional performance measures have changed over the years, but monthly contracting and accession numbers have remained largely unchanged as the primary performance measures. Recruiters said that they are under pressure to make their goal beginning on the first day of every month, and the pressure often does not let up when they make their monthly goal. Recruiters told us that, once they make their own monthly goal, they are often pressured to recruit one more person to cover for other recruiters who do not make their goal. Table 4.1 shows the number of recruits the average production recruiter needed to recruit for the services to achieve their 1997 accession goals.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>Navy goals are formally assigned only to the station level and not to individual recruiters. In addition, the Navy recently changed its procedures to combat last minute DEP attrition. Now, the monthly station goal is raised only if a recruit drops out of the DEP within 5 weeks of the date he or she was scheduled to leave for basic training.

<sup>3</sup>Production recruiters are those recruiters who are expected to actually bring people into the services each month. Other recruiters are sometimes assigned supervisory and administrative responsibilities, such as conducting field training, and they are not given a monthly recruiting goal.

**Table 4.1: Recruiter Productivity  
Needed to Support 1997 Service  
Accession Goals**

Service	Accession goals	Average number of production recruiters	Number of recruits needed yearly per production recruiter
Army	89,700	5,525	16.2
Navy	53,628	3,850	13.9
Marine Corps	35,300	2,650	13.3
Air Force	30,200	1,055	28.6

Source: DOD and service testimony before the Subcommittee on Personnel, Senate Armed Services Committee, March 1997.

Recruiter monthly goals vary from one to four or more recruits. However, since all of the services need their production recruiters to achieve more than one accession per month to make their service's accession goal, most recruiters are assigned a minimum goal of two recruits per month. Many Air Force recruiters have goals of three accessions per month because of that service's higher requirements per recruiter.

Recruiter responses in DOD's 1996 recruiter satisfaction survey showed that recruiter job performance was at an all-time low. Despite the successes of the service recruiting commands, only 42 percent of the recruiters who responded to DOD's survey said that they had made their goal 9 or more months out of the previous 12. This figure represented a decrease of 8 percent from DOD's 1994 survey and the lowest level since DOD began its recruiter surveys in 1989. In addition, 28 percent of the respondents said that their monthly goals were unachievable.

## Recruiters Are Dissatisfied With Working Hours and Pressures to Make Goals

At the same time that recruiters' job performance has been dropping, their working hours have been increasing. In DOD's 1996 recruiter survey, 63 percent of recruiters said they worked 60 or more hours per week. These results show that the percentage of recruiters working long hours is at the highest level since recruiter surveys were first taken in 1989. In addition, only 23 percent of the services' recruiters said they would remain in recruiting if given the chance to be reassigned to another job.

During our review, we spoke to 35 recruiters who had a total of over 280 years of recruiting experience. Many of these recruiters corroborated the results of the 1996 recruiter survey. They said that working hours in many places are getting worse and that recruiters everywhere experience tremendous pressures to meet their monthly goal. Recruiters who do not make their goal are often put on extended working hours until the goal is

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achieved, and successful recruiters who exceed their goal are often required to work longer hours to make up for those who do not make their goal.

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**Time Off Is an Important  
Motivator**

All of the 35 experienced recruiters we spoke with said that time off is an important incentive for motivating recruiters. In fact, most of the recruiters said it is the biggest incentive a production recruiter ever receives. This sentiment was repeated even among those recruiters who had been meritoriously promoted as a reward for their recruiting excellence.

Senior enlisted officials in the Marine Corps told us that the commanding officer of the Marine Corps Recruiting Command had given recruiters 4 days off after the Command made its 24th consecutive monthly goal. However, according to these officials, many supervisors did not give their recruiters the time off and never even informed them that they were supposed to get the time off.

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**Recruiters Have Problems  
Taking Leave**

Command-level officials in all of the services encourage recruiters to take leave. However, the same encouragement does not always flow down the chain of command to production recruiters. In the Air Force, recruiters who take 2 weeks of leave in 1 month will not be assigned a goal for that month. Army recruiters are encouraged to take 1 week of leave per quarter. According to senior Marine Corps Recruiting Command officials, the commanding officer of the Marine Corps Recruiting Command personally monitors recruiter leave balances to ensure that recruiters are not denied the opportunity to take leave. Despite all these efforts, 68 percent of the recruiters who responded to DOD's 1996 survey said the demands of the job had prevented them from taking leave during the previous 12 months. This figure represented almost a 50-percent increase from the level in the 1994 survey and the highest level since the first DOD recruiter survey in 1989.

We spoke with several recruiters who were called in off leave or who came to work during their leave. With regard to the problem of taking leave, some recruiters suggested that the services should close all recruiting and MEPS stations during the week between Christmas and New Year's Day and require recruiters to take leave during that typically unproductive time period. The recruiters said this action is the only way to

guarantee that production recruiters will actually get time off to use their leave.

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## Recruiters Have Little or No Control Over Their Monthly Goals

Under the current monthly goal system, recruiters cannot work ahead and sign extra recruits in one month so they can ease up and take some leave the next month. Recruiters who make double their monthly goal are usually assigned the same or higher goals for the next month. In addition, recruiters who have a bad month face concerns about how they will be rated after missing one or more monthly goals, even when they meet or exceed their annual goals.

A senior official at the Air Force Recruiting Service suggested that quarterly floating goals could overcome recruiter concerns about monthly goals and still provide the services with a steady flow of recruits to fill training slots. Under a quarterly floating goal system, recruiters would still be assigned monthly goals, and their performance would still be evaluated on a monthly basis. However, each month the current month's goal would be added to the goals of the previous 2 months and compared to the recruiter's performance during that 3-month period, rather than comparing the current month's performance to the current month's goal.

Recruiters who make their goals every month under the current system would be unaffected by changing to quarterly floating goals. They would still be considered successful. Recruiters who never make their monthly goals would also be unaffected by a change to quarterly floating goals. However, quarterly floating goals could benefit recruiters who make their annual goals but underproduce in some months and overproduce in others. Appendix II contains additional information about quarterly floating goals, including examples of how these goals could help individual recruiters without jeopardizing the services' ability to make their command goals.

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## Conclusions

Recruiters can be motivated to support DOD's long-term strategic goals, but they must view their award systems as fair and reasonable and closely linked to those strategic goals. The Marine Corps and the Navy have tied many of their awards and incentives to basic training graduation rates, establishing a link between recruiter performance and DOD's strategic retention goal. Marine Corps and Navy recruiters thus understand that they bear some of the responsibility for basic training attrition. The Army and the Air Force award systems place very little weight on recruit



performance at basic training and base awards primarily on the number of recruits a recruiter enlists or sends to basic training. Under Army and Air Force award systems that do not tie awards to retention, recruiters may mistakenly believe that they have no responsibility for basic training attrition. However, because these services need to replace the people who drop out of basic training, recruiters are given monthly goals that are higher than they would be if attrition did not occur. Thus, recruiters are responsible for making up for basic training attrition.

The results of DOD's most recent recruiter survey demonstrate a fairly high level of dissatisfaction among recruiters over the current system of monthly goals and the long hours that they must work to achieve the goals. This dissatisfaction may create morale problems that adversely affect productivity. These conditions might also discourage others from volunteering for recruiting duty. Changing the monthly goal system to a floating quarterly goal system could relieve some pressure from recruiters and enhance their working conditions without sacrificing overall recruiting goals. Better morale and working conditions could encourage additional candidates to volunteer for recruiting duty.

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## Recommendations

In our January 1997 report on military attrition, we recommended that the services link recruiting quotas more closely to recruits' successful completion of basic training. We also suggested consideration of a quarterly floating goal system. In a March 1997 memorandum directing the services to act on our report, DOD deferred taking a position on those issues pending recommendations from this follow-up review. This report expands upon our earlier work and provides a detailed example of how a floating goal system might operate.

To enhance recruiter success and help recruiters focus on DOD's strategic retention goal, we recommend that the Secretary of Defense instruct the services to link recruiter awards more closely to recruits' successful completion of basic training.

To enhance recruiters' working conditions and the services' ability to attract qualified candidates for recruiting duty, we also recommend that the Secretary of Defense encourage the use of quarterly floating goals as an alternative to the services' current systems of monthly goals.

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## Agency Comments and Our Evaluation

DOD concurred with our recommendation that the services link recruiter awards more closely to recruits' successful completion of basic training, stating that the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Force Management Policy will ensure that all the services incorporate recruit success in basic training into their recruiter incentive systems.

DOD partially concurred with our recommendation that the Secretary of Defense encourage the use of quarterly floating goals as an alternative to the services' current systems of monthly goals. DOD's primary concern with this recommendation is that floating quarterly goals would reduce the services' ability to make corrections to recruiting difficulties before they become unmanageable.

DOD also stated that the Air Force had tried floating goals, and that its experience indicated that such a system leads to a lessened sense of urgency early in the goaling cycle and more pressure later in the cycle. In a follow-on discussion with a senior official at the Air Force Recruiting Service, we learned that the Air Force did experiment with a quarterly system in its northeast region from October to December 1991. However, the Air Force canceled this experiment in January 1992 when it discovered that many recruiters had fallen behind in their goals for that 3-month period.

We do not believe that the Air Force's experience truly measured the potential merits of a quarterly floating goal system since the Air Force canceled this program after only 3 months. While we agree that recruiting commands must maintain the ability to control the flow of new recruits into the system on a monthly basis, it should be noted that this proposal is for floating, rather than static, quarterly goals. As a result, recruiting shortfalls would still be identified in the first month that they occur and not disrupt the flow of recruits to training. Accordingly, we believe that a longer test period than 3 months would be needed to fully test this concept.

Moreover, DOD recruiter surveys show that recruiter performance is at an all-time low and that the percentage of recruiters working long hours is the highest it has ever been since the surveys were first taken in 1989. We believe this matter warrants serious attention and that these problems will continue if changes are not made. The quarterly floating goal proposal would provide recruiters with some flexibility and enhanced quality of life and still provide recruiting commands with the ability to control the flow of new recruits into the system on a monthly basis. Better working

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**Chapter 4**  
**Some Service Performance Measures Ignore**  
**Attrition, and Monthly Goals May Restrict**  
**Recruiters**

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conditions and recruiter morale could ultimately encourage additional candidates to volunteer for recruiting duty, thereby easing the current burden on recruiting commands to screen and select new recruiters.



# Costs of Recruiting, Training, and Attrition

## Costs of Recruiting and Training

The military services' investment in their enlisted personnel is made up of both fixed and variable costs. The fixed costs can be thought of as overhead or infrastructure costs that are not easily or quickly changed and cannot be directly associated with a single enlistee. Examples of this type of cost are the total number of recruiters or drill instructors or the money spent by a service on a television advertisement campaign for recruiting. The variable costs are directly connected to each recruit, such as costs for issuance of clothing and pay and allowances for each enlistee.

Table I.1 shows the services' 1996 and 1997 recruiting and advertising investment for each recruit who reported to basic training.

**Table I.1: Recruiting and Advertising Investment per Recruit**

	Recruiting and advertising in fiscal year 1996	Recruiting and advertising in fiscal year 1997	Advertising in fiscal year 1997
Army	\$8,310	\$7,354	\$775
Navy	6,636	6,297	687
Marine Corps	5,165	4,923	559
Air Force	3,740	3,934	349
DOD	7,187	6,704	673

Source: President's budget for fiscal years 1998-99.

The figures above include the costs of advertising, leasing recruiting facilities, joint advertising and market research, recruiter cars, supplies, and recruiter and support personnel salaries. The figures also include recruit bonuses and college fund expenses. The figures do not include the cost of transporting recruits to and from basic training or the cost of housing, feeding, clothing, and paying the recruits while they are at basic training. Based on Navy figures, we placed those costs at approximately \$5,000 in our report last year.<sup>1</sup> Collectively, the service figures are consistent with the Department of Defense's (DOD) figures, which indicate that it costs between \$8,900 and \$12,400 to recruit and train an applicant through basic training.

<sup>1</sup>Military Attrition: DOD Could Save Millions by Better Screening Enlisted Personnel (GAO/NSIAD-97-39, Jan. 6, 1997).

## Difficulties Associated With Estimating Attrition Costs

Although the cost of keeping personnel who cannot adjust to military life or meet established standards could be very high, DOD officials have acknowledged that a certain percentage of attrition is probably avoidable. Over the past 2 decades, numerous attrition studies have been conducted by DOD and other government and private organizations. However, none of the studies has been able to accurately define an acceptable or desirable level of attrition. In addition, none has determined when the costs of recruiting and training are recouped. We recognize the limitations of available cost information concerning attrition. Therefore, we have used average cost data from the services and DOD only to identify the general magnitude of the military attrition problem rather than a precise cost savings figure.

The costs of attrition increase each day recruits remain in a training or temporary status. Once recruits report to their permanent duty stations and begin performing the jobs that they were recruited to perform, the services begin to receive benefits on their investment in recruiting and training. Attrition costs can decline at varying rates both among different career fields and within career fields. The rate of decline depends on the amount of on-the-job training required for an individual to become proficient at the job.

Approximately one-half of all attrition occurs between the time recruits are first sworn into a service at a military entrance processing station and the time they complete basic training. Calculating the cost savings that would result if the services reduced this attrition is complicated. Nevertheless, there are two different ways of reducing the cost of this early attrition. One way is to take actions to lower attrition rates, without compromising retention standards. A second way is to accept current attrition rates, but cause attrition to occur as early in the recruiting or training process as possible. Delayed Entry Program (DEP) attrition is less expensive than basic training attrition, which is generally less expensive than attrition that occurs during advanced training. The Army Recruiting Command calculated that, in fiscal year 1996, each loss from its DEP cost approximately \$1,800. However, losses from basic training would be even greater because the costs of feeding, clothing, transporting, and housing the recruits would have to be added to the DEP loss cost. Attrition occurring during advanced training is costlier still, due to the additional military pay and infrastructure costs associated with such training.

The cost savings that could be expected by reducing attrition are difficult to measure for four reasons. First, lower attrition rates could lead to a

decline in recruiting and training support costs. Recruiting support costs include items such as recruiter, administrative, and management support salaries; facility leases; advertising costs; and recruiter car expenses. Training support costs include drill instructor, administrative, and management support salaries and the cost of maintaining recruit housing, classrooms, and other facilities. These cost reductions, however, would not necessarily be proportional to the decrease in attrition. For example, if attrition were reduced by 10 percent, it is likely that infrastructure costs would be reduced by less than 10 percent. One reason that infrastructure costs are not likely to decrease in the same proportion as attrition is that the services may need to ensure that their recruiting and training organizations maintain excess capacity in the event of future increases in accessions. The services now determine staffing and funding for recruiting commands based on the services' accessions missions, which could be lower if attrition were to decrease.

Second, the near-term savings in variable costs per recruit can vary significantly depending on which recruits are separated. Some of these differences are readily apparent. For example, the transportation costs for sending an Air Force recruit from Alaska to and from basic training at Lackland Air Force Base in San Antonio are obviously much higher than the transportation costs of sending a recruit who lives in San Antonio to basic training. Other cost differences may not be as obvious. Only a limited number of recruits, for example, receive enlistment bonuses or service college funds, and the attrition of those recruits costs the services more than the attrition of recruits who do not receive these benefits. Pay rates of recruits can also be different. Recruits who have completed some college and recruits who supply their recruiters with referrals who enlist can enter basic training in pay grades E-2 or E-3 rather than in pay grade E-1. The difference in pay between E-1 and E-3 is about \$200 per month. In addition, uniforms for female servicemembers can cost more than those for male servicemembers, and uniform costs can vary within gender categories depending on a recruit's size.

Third, any additional costs that might be incurred by the services to better prepare recruiters and recruits would have to be subtracted from any calculations of marginal savings. Such added mechanisms could include adjustments to recruiter screening processes, recruiter training, and DEP management.

Fourth, recent recruiting practices in the Navy and the Army could increase the costs of attrition. For example, the Navy is now requiring all



applicants without a high school diploma to score high enough on the enlistment screening test to qualify for advanced training in order to enlist. In the past, the Navy enlisted many of these nondiploma applicants in general seaman, airman, or fireman career fields that did not require any advanced training. According to the Navy's compensatory screening model, high-quality applicants without diplomas should behave similarly to those with high school diplomas. However, Navy recruits without diplomas are continuing to experience attrition rates that are much higher than recruits with diplomas. If attrition rates for nondiploma recruits continue to be much higher than those of recruits with diplomas, the Navy will actually be increasing the cost of its attrition by requiring nondiploma recruits to qualify for advanced training.

The Army is loosening its criteria for its "quick ship" bonuses.<sup>2</sup> Previously, the Army had only been paying these bonuses to recruits who scored in the top three enlistment test categories. However, it recently began offering these bonuses to recruits in a lower test category as well. Recruits from this lower category have higher attrition rates than recruits from the top categories. Therefore, if attrition statistics remain unchanged, a higher percentage of the recruits who drop out will have been paid bonuses, thus driving up the cost of Army attrition.

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<sup>2</sup>Quick ship bonuses are paid to recruits who leave for basic training within 30 days of their initial enlistment.

## Quarterly Floating Goals

Under the current goal system, recruiters are continually evaluated on a month to month basis, and recruiters and recruiting command officials told us that recruiters commonly hear the same question and comment about their performance in relation to their monthly goals. The question is what has the recruiter done lately. The implication of this question is that making or exceeding last month's goal no longer counts if the recruiter has not made this month's goal. The comment is that the recruiter is either a "hero" or a "zero." Recruiters who make their goals in a given month are considered heros. Recruiters who miss their goals (even if they enlist three people for a goal of four) are considered zeros.

If the services adopted quarterly floating goal systems, recruiters would still be assigned monthly goals, and their performance would still be evaluated on a monthly basis. However, each month the current month's goal would be added to the goals of the previous 2 months and compared to the recruiter's performance during that 3-month period. Recruiters who make their monthly goals every single month under the current system would be unaffected if the services changed to quarterly floating goals. They would still be considered heros. Recruiters who never make their monthly goals would also be unaffected if the services changed to quarterly floating goals. They would still be considered zeros. Quarterly floating goals are most likely to benefit recruiters who make their annual goals but underproduce in some months and overproduce in other months. Table II.1 shows an example of how quarterly floating goals could work and how they could benefit some recruiters. For example, recruiters who make their annual goal could be considered zeros in some months under the monthly goal system, but they would be considered heros under the quarterly floating goal system.

**Appendix II**  
**Quarterly Floating Goals**

**Table II.1: Comparison of Recruiter Goals, Performance, and Monthly Evaluations Under Two Different Systems**

Month	Monthly goal system			Quarterly floating goal system		
	Monthly goal	Monthly enlistments	Recruiter's evaluation	Floating quarterly goal <sup>a</sup>	Quarterly enlistments <sup>b</sup>	Recruiter's evaluation
January	2	3	Hero	2	3	Hero
February	2	1	Zero	4	4	Hero
March	2	2	Hero	6	6	Hero
April	2	3	Hero	6	6	Hero
May	2	1	Zero	6	6	Hero
June	3	4	Hero	7	8	Hero
July	3	4	Hero	8	9	Hero
August	3	2	Zero	9	10	Hero
September	2	3	Hero	8	9	Hero
October	2	2	Hero	7	7	Hero
November	2	1	Zero	6	6	Hero
December	2	3	Hero	6	6	Hero
<b>Total</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>Met goal in 8 of 12 months</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>Met floating goal every month</b>

<sup>a</sup>The goal for January is only January's goal; the goal for February is figured by adding January and February goals; thereafter, the floating quarterly goal is figured by adding the last 3 monthly goals.

<sup>b</sup>Enlistments for January include only those made in January; enlistments for February include those made in January and February; thereafter, quarterly enlistments are figured by adding enlistments for the last 3 months on a rolling basis.

A quarterly floating goal system could be phased in over a 3-month period. For example, in January, recruiters could be evaluated on the basis of performance in 1 month (January). In February, they could be evaluated on the basis of performance in 2 months (January and February). In March they could be evaluated on the basis of performance in 3 months (January, February, and March). Once quarterly floating goals were fully implemented in March, recruiters would be evaluated each month on their performance over the last 3 months compared with their goals. According to our example in table II.1, in October, a recruiter's performance in August, September and October would be measured against the goals for those 3 months, or seven enlistments. In November, a recruiter's performance in September, October, and November would be measured against the goals for those particular 3 months, or six enlistments. This pattern would continue in each successive month. When a new year begins, monthly totals would carry over from the previous year.

**Appendix II**  
**Quarterly Floating Goals**

Table II.1 also demonstrates how a quarterly floating system could help the recruiter who falls short of making his or her goal in any given month. In May, for example, the recruiter would only have to enlist one person to stay on track, even though May's monthly goal is two people. The recruiter would only need one person in May because he or she made the goal of two in March and surpassed the goal by one in April. As a result, the recruiter might be inclined to schedule some leave in May. However, in September the recruiter would need to enlist three people, even though the goal for that month is two enlistees. This is due to the fact that the recruiter missed August's goal by one.

In discussing quarterly floating goals, officials from one of the service recruiting commands expressed concerns that quarterly floating goals could cause their best recruiters' production levels to drop. Although drops could occur, we do not believe these drops would be significant. Any drops that might occur could be offset by the benefits of the quarterly floating goal system. For example, these goals could encourage additional high-caliber recruiters to volunteer for permanent recruiting duty, thus strengthening the services' recruiting commands. Table II.2 demonstrates how checks are built into the quarterly floating goals and shows why quarterly floating goals will not cause production to drop significantly for the services' best recruiters.

**Table II.2: Production Numbers Necessary for Excellent Recruiters to Stay on Track**

Month	Monthly goal	Actual monthly enlistments	Quarterly enlistments	Quarterly floating goal	Number of recruits needed to stay on track	Recruiter's evaluation under quarterly floating goals
January	3	9	9	3	3	Hero
February	3	0	9	6	0	Hero
March	3	2	11	9	0	Hero
April	3	6	8	9	7	Zero

Note: See notes in table II.1 for an explanation of quarterly enlistments and quarterly floating goals.

In this extreme example, the recruiter makes his or her entire quarterly goal (January through March) in January. The recruiter then takes off the entire month of February, and part of March. The recruiter is unlikely to take off all of March because doing so would increase April's goal to nine enlistments. In April, the recruiter enlists six people, more than two times April's goal, but still faces possible counseling, training, and increased

**Appendix II**  
**Quarterly Floating Goals**

supervision for not making his or her quarterly floating goal. The recruiter is then likely to get back on track and overproduce on a monthly basis, which he or she is capable of doing based on January's performance.

Although this scenario is possible, we believe the example shown in table II.3 more accurately depicts the types of differences that are likely to occur for excellent recruiters under quarterly floating goals.

Table II.3 shows how recruiters who operate under a monthly goal system are more limited in using their leave than recruiters who operate under a quarterly floating goal system. Under the quarterly floating goal system, the recruiter who is able to work longer and harder in May and June is then able to take off the entire month of July. The recruiter is also able to work less in December and April by working additional hours during the preceding months.

**Table II.3: Possible Production Levels of Excellent Recruiters Under Different Goals**

Month	Monthly goal	Monthly enlistments	Floating quarterly goal	Quarterly enlistments	Recruiter's evaluation
January	3	3	3	3	3 for 3
February	3	4	6	4	7 for 6
March	3	4	9	4	11 for 9
April	3	3	9	2	10 for 9
May	3	3	9	4	10 for 9
June	3	5	9	6	12 for 9
July	3	4	9	0	10 for 9
August	3	3	9	5	11 for 9
September	3	4	9	4	9 for 9
October	3	3	9	3	12 for 9
November	3	4	9	5	12 for 9
December	3	3	9	2	10 for 9
<b>Annual total</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>42 for 36</b>

Note: See notes in table II.1 for an explanation of quarterly enlistments and quarterly floating goals.

During our field work, we interviewed production recruiters who said that they would not consider becoming career recruiters because their supervisors were constantly dictating their working hours and daily activities. These recruiters believed that they were not being given the respect that they had earned as noncommissioned officers who were

productive recruiters. One of these recruiters was the top producer for his region. Compared to monthly goals, quarterly floating goals would allow individual recruiters more flexibility in the performance of their duties. Allowing recruiters the same type of flexibility and decision-making authority as other noncommissioned officers in the services may encourage more of the services' outstanding recruiters to become career recruiters.

The service recruiting commands were also concerned about the effect that quarterly floating goals could have on their training pipelines. However, because recruiters would still be evaluated monthly, fluctuations in the numbers of recruits entering the services each month are not likely to be significantly different than fluctuations under the current system of monthly goals. Tables II.2 and II.3 illustrate that recruiters cannot underproduce 2 months in a row and still be successful. Under a quarterly floating goal system, the monthly production levels of individual recruiters are likely to vary more than they do under monthly goals. However, all recruiters are not likely to overproduce and underproduce during the same months. Therefore, the overproduction of some recruiters in a given month is likely to be offset by the underproduction of other recruiters in that same month. Training pipelines are not currently level throughout the year. For example, the Marine Corps has established accession goals of 32 percent for October through January, 22 percent for February through May, and 46 percent for June through September.

# Comments From the Department of Defense



FORCE MANAGEMENT  
POLICY

ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF DEFENSE  
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Mr. Mark E. Gebicke  
Director, Military Operations and Capabilities Issues  
National Security and International Affairs Division  
U.S. General Accounting Office  
Washington, DC 20548

Dear Mr. Gebicke:

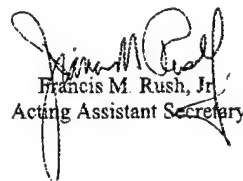
This is the Department of Defense (DoD) response to the General Accounting Office (GAO) draft report, "MILITARY RECRUITING: DoD Could Improve Its Recruiter Selection and Incentive Systems," dated November 21, 1997 (GAO Code 703189/OSD Case 1497). The Department concurs or partially concurs with all recommendations in the report.

The report provides a broad overview of the recruiter selection and incentive process. This is a complex process spanning four Services with varying cultures, recruiting missions and personnel requirements. The report has accurately depicted the current processes in use by the Services and included in its recommendations many of the innovative practices now in use by one of more Service.

The Department is vitally interested in the recruitment and retention of well-qualified men and women into the Armed Forces. As stated by the GAO, the Department has included this goal in its strategic plan under the Government Performance and Results Act of 1993. GAO discussions and interviews with recruiting officials during the course of this evaluation have prompted the Services to set into motion new procedures that the Department expects to yield positive results.

Detailed Departmental comments on the draft report recommendations are enclosed. An annotated draft of the report also is enclosed. The annotations include both technical/factual corrections and suggestions for clarification of issues. The Department appreciates the opportunity to comment on the GAO draft report.

Sincerely,

  
Francis M. Rush, Jr.  
Acting Assistant Secretary

Enclosures:  
As stated





GAO DRAFT REPORT - DATED NOVEMBER 21, 1997

(GAO Code 703189) OSD CASE 1497

"MILITARY RECRUITING: DOD COULD IMPROVE ITS RECRUITER  
SELECTION AND INCENTIVE SYSTEMS"

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE COMMENTS TO THE  
RECOMMENDATIONS

**RECOMMENDATION 1:** For the Services to meet DoD's strategic goal of recruiting and retaining personnel, optimize recruiting command efficiency by identifying personnel who are likely to succeed as recruiters, and increase recruits' chances of graduating from basic training, the GAO recommended that the Secretary of Defense instruct the Services to:

- use experienced field recruiters to personally interview all prospective recruiters and evaluate their potential to effectively communicate with applicants, parents, teachers, and others in the civilian community;
- jointly explore the feasibility of developing or procuring assessment tests that can aid in the selection of recruiters;
- instruct the Service recruiting schools to emphasize the retention portion of DoD's long-term strategic goal by having drill instructors meet with students at the Service recruiter schools and having the recruiters in training meet separating recruits and those being held back due to poor physical conditioning. These practices could establish an ongoing dialogue between recruiters and drill instructors and enhance understanding of problems that lead to early attrition. (pp. 8-9, p. 32/GAO Draft Report)

**DOD RESPONSE:** Partially Concur.

DoD agrees that the selection and training of the recruiter force is of vital importance to the manning of the Armed Forces. These men and women often provide the first impressions of the military to the youth of America. The GAO recommendation for the use of experienced recruiters to personally interview prospective recruiters is valid, where possible. As stated, the Air Force uses seasoned field recruiters to personally interview all prospective recruiters.

Because of the large number of men and women selected by the Army annually for recruiting duty, and the geographic diversity of their assignments, initial screening by a currently serving recruiter is not economically feasible. Each soldier who volunteers or

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is detailed for recruiting duty must meet the established character, moral and mental standards necessary for performance of recruiting duties prior to acceptance, and as the GAO stated, are interviewed by their chain of command. Moreover, sales ability, personality, and stress coping skills are evaluated and monitored during recruiter training and on the job. Individuals who do not possess these abilities are quickly weeded out of the recruiter work force either at the recruiting school or early in their recruiting assignment.

The GAO draft report stated that the Navy hoped to establish a traveling recruiter selection team, and in fact, the Navy has assembled a "Recruit the Recruiter" team, consisting of four full-time career recruiters, augmented by successful field recruiters. This team will give presentations to sailors throughout the fleet, and will interview and screen those who are interested. Sailors' spouses will be involved in the screening process as well.

Although the GAO draft report does discuss the additional screening provided by the Marine Corps at its recruiter school, it minimizes the depth of this screening. The Marine Corps believes that no operational recruiters are placed on the street without being screened to ensure they possess the basic qualities required to succeed as a recruiter.

With regard to the use of an assessment test to aid in the selection of recruiters, the GAO draft report correctly mentions that the Air Force is using a commercially developed biographical screening test. Although it began using the Emotional Quotient Inventory (EQI) in November 1997, it is too early to evaluate its effectiveness. The Navy is planning to test the use of a similar instrument. The Army Recruiting and Retention School already has instituted a screening process in which a psychologist interviews soldiers who are prospective recruiters to determine if they are suitable for recruiting duty. The psychologist evaluates applicants' motivational and personality traits, integrity and character. Additional studies aimed at developing a "successful recruiter profile" are underway by the Army Research Institute for the Behavioral and Social Sciences. One especially important study goal is to develop a test to identify those soldiers most suited for recruiting duty. Work-related personality traits as well as individual motivation and expectation levels will be measured. The Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Force Management Policy will work with the Services to evaluate these and other devices.

The recommendation concerning better communication between the recruiting force and drill instructors is sound and viable. Since the Army Recruiting Command has a liaison at each of its basic training sites, it will establish a linkage between the Fort Jackson liaison and the Recruiting and Retention School. Such a linkage will allow the liaison at Fort Jackson to discuss on-going and current trends associated with the behavior of new soldiers. The curriculum at the Recruiting and Retention School is being reviewed to determine if it is feasible for recruiter students to visit the reception battalion to see first-hand the transformation of new recruits into trainees, and for them to meet

with current drill instructors who will present real life situations that result in the premature separation of new recruits.

The Navy has implemented "Refresher Training," a one-week program where new recruiters visit the Recruit Training Command and have the opportunity to meet and interview new recruits during the last week of basic training. The curriculum at the Air Force recruiting school already includes an in-depth tour of basic training. This tour gives recruiter students the opportunity for feedback sessions with airmen in training, military training instructors, and other staff members. Additionally, recruiters and their chain of command receive by-name, by-reason feedback on all basic training losses. This information is used to train recruiters to alleviate specific issues that may exacerbate basic training attrition.

**RECOMMENDATION 2:** To maintain recruit quality and increase a recruit's chances of graduating from basic training, the GAO recommended that the Secretary of Defense instruct the Army, Navy and Air Force to implement the Marine Corps' practice of administering a physical fitness test to recruits before they report to basic training. In addition, the GAO recommended that the Secretary encourage the Services to incorporate more structured physical fitness training into their delayed entry program training. (p. 9, p. 41/GAO Draft Report)

**DOD RESPONSE:** Concur.

Recruit physical conditioning is important to successful completion of basic training. However, GAO's statement that physical fitness is not among the criteria for enlistment is misleading. All applicants undergo a comprehensive physical examination, which determines their current medical status, and overall general physical condition. Successful completion of the physical examination determines that the applicant possesses a level of wellness necessary for completion of basic training. Physical training, designed to prepare trainees for the physical fitness test, is an integral part of the basic training curriculum.

As stated in the GAO draft report, the Marine Corps currently includes mandatory physical training and a physical fitness test in its Delayed Entry Program (DEP). To attempt to reduce basic training attrition, the other Services are taking steps to better prepare DEP enrollees for the physical rigors of basic training. The Army's plan includes providing medical care entitlement for DEP members who may suffer injury while voluntarily participating in organized physical training, developing a DEP physical fitness program that is flexible enough to accommodate recruiter schedules and applicant participation, and issuing each DEP member a guide that addresses proper running shoes. Army Physical Fitness Test events (to include the standards for passing) and a physical training regimen for individual use. The Navy is revising its Delayed Entry Program Manual and Recruiter's Guide to Success to include guidance on physical training

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programs. The revisions will include more structured physical training at DEP meetings and a recommended program of physical training that DEP members can accomplish on their own. The Air Force encourages recruits in the DEP to enter into an individual physical conditioning program and provides materials to assist them.

Because of the questions surrounding the issue of liability and health care in the event of injury during DEP physical training, the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Force Management Policy will investigate the legal status of DEP members and the limits of their medical entitlements.

**RECOMMENDATION 3:** To enhance recruiter success and help recruiters focus on DoD's strategic retention goal, the GAO recommended that the Secretary of Defense instruct the Services to link recruiter awards more closely to recruits' successful completion of basic training. (p. 9, p. 55/GAO Draft Report)

**DOD RESPONSE:** Concur.

The variables associated with the success or failure of a recruit at basic training make a direct link to recruiter performance difficult. Recruiters can control to some extent the quality of the individuals they recruit by weeding out those who do not meet standards. However, once recruiters turn enlistees over to the training base, they can neither anticipate nor influence the impact of the infinite variety of factors that come into play. The fact that enlistees sustain injuries, have a hardship at home, become ill or otherwise fail for reasons beyond recruiters' control is beyond the recruiters' realm of responsibility or accountability.

Nevertheless, the Navy and Marine Corps use trainee completion in their recruiter incentive programs. Given the potential benefit that could be derived from linking trainee performance to recruiter success, the Army is developing a new recruiter awards system that will recognize the performance of new recruits. Accordingly, the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Force Management Policy will ensure that all Services incorporate recruit success in basic training to recruiter incentive systems. The Air Force is interested in the Marine Corps method of maintaining contact during basic training, and are considering methods to incorporate similar "customer service" methods.

**RECOMMENDATION 4:** To enhance recruiter working conditions and the Services' ability to attract qualified candidates for recruiting duty, the GAO also recommended that the Secretary of Defense encourage the use of quarterly floating goals as an alternative to their current systems of monthly goals. (p. 9, p. 55/GAO Draft Report)

**DOD RESPONSE:** Partially Concur.

Now on p. 36.

Non on p. 36.

The monthly goaling process currently used by the Army Recruiting Command has a built-in quarterly and annual recognition system. While the mission is parceled into monthly requirements, it is viewed cumulatively, i.e., a shortfall in one month or quarter may be recouped in the next month or quarter. The Army's current process has safeguards that allow recruiters to make up shortfalls and credits for overproduction to be forwarded for both quarterly and annual achievements. Distribution of the mission is based on existing market conditions and is driven in part by recruiters' prospecting and processing plans. The recruiting and enlistment cycle is not always smooth when viewed mathematically. The Mission Accomplishment Plan (MAP) is designed to ensure that requirements are spread over the annual recruiting cycle. This allows recruiters to plan their work to maximize productivity.

The Navy's new contract objectives are based on annual needs and are divided into monthly pieces to ensure consistent recruiter effort and to support achievement of accession goals. The Navy believes that de-linking new contract objectives from monthly accession goals would weaken its ability to provide a steady accession flow through the training base.

The Marine Corps has experimented with goaling processes of varying lengths and found that each proved less effective than the current monthly system. The Marine Corps monthly goaling model allows for immediate analysis and correction of recruiting difficulties before they become unmanageable. The Marine Corps believes that the recommended GAO goaling method would focus mission attainment and analysis of that mission attainment too far down the road to correct before it adversely affected the flow through the training pipeline and Service end-strength.

The Air Force has tried floating goals and its experience has indicated that such a system leads to a lessened sense of recruiter urgency early in the goaling cycle and increased urgency and more pressure later in the cycle. An unacceptable percentage of recruiters put off until "tomorrow" important recruiting activities which lead to goal achievement and placed unit mission accomplishment in jeopardy. Through training, the Air Force prepares its recruiters to operate under stress, and to understand that sales is a pressure environment. Even when a recruiter is fully trained the Air Force understands the potential for an occasional missed monthly goal, but it is only when a recruiter misses goal in consecutive months or quarters that measures are taken to evaluate the circumstances which may have lead to the lack of production. Then appropriate training or accountability actions are applied.

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